

# CHRISTIAN DRAMA

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*by Sir Francis Younghusband, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., and Mrs. O. Stevenson*

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## *Editor's Notes*

The Annual General Meeting will be held this year at 11.30 a.m. on Friday, November 30th. The meeting-place will again be the Horsehoe Hotel in Tottenham Court Road, and arrangements have been made for a buffet lunch. Further particulars will be sent to members. This year the Summer School was held at King Alfred's College, Winchester. As will be gathered from accounts in this issue, it was an enjoyable and stimulating nine days. We are pleased to say that we have managed to book Keele College, Staffordshire, for next year.

Our new offices in Shaftesbury Avenue were dedicated by the Rev. Peter Bullock Flint, one of the Chaplains to the Executive, on Friday, August 28th. Nearly forty people crowded into the rooms, and took part in the simple dedication service. Afterwards, our Chairman of Council, Mr. E. Martin Browne, welcomed the visitors, expressing special pleasure at the presence of Col. R. C. Grant and Mr. Nugent Bonck.

Miss Stella Mary Pearce generously gave her services for the benefit of the R.D.S. professional producers and designers in a week-end course on Design, held on July 20th-22nd, at the British Drama League headquarters in Fitzroy Square. The R.D.S. is very grateful to Miss Pearce for her kindness, and those who attended found the course of greatest value.



Miss Joan Ford completed her inquiries, undertaken at the request of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, into Religious Drama in Europe in March this year, and has compiled a full report of her discoveries in "all the countries of Continental Europe this side of the Iron Curtain." A number of copies of her report have been cyclostyled and bound, and they are available from the R.D.S. office, price 7s.6d. Meanwhile, we are glad to publish the first instalment of the final section.

## *The European Scene*

*Conclusions from an Inquiry into Religious Drama in Europe,  
Winter, 1955-56.*

JOAN FORD

### PART I

"Conclusions" is certainly the wrong word. There are no conclusions for this inquiry is only a beginning, but there are certain leading lines of thought suggested by it which may be useful to those writing or producing Christian plays. The whole situation is very complex, and often one has to be content to observe without trying to explain or draw any conclusions.

First, there is Christian drama everywhere, newly-born, recently revived or anciently traditional; the survival of ancient or Renaissance traditions is only found in Roman Catholic countries. The revival in comparatively recent times in northern Europe is not older than the twentieth century anywhere, and in most countries dates from 1930 or later. I think that this revival is undeniably a self-conscious movement, though, as I said before, it is one result of a renewed awareness among Christians in our time of the Incarnation and also that it is not fanciful to connect it with the declining power of the word, heard or read, in comparison with that of the image in this age of cinema, strip-cartoon and television. There are frequent complaints from teachers who show that the authority of "what teacher said," or "what it says in the Bible" is weak beside that of "what we saw on TV."

At the same time, the effort of all the most interesting dramatic activities which I saw is away from cinematic technique and the mere spectacular, and towards the establishment of the theatre as unique, through the fact of the living commerce between the actors and their public. Indoor theatre, at any rate, cannot compete with the cinema in the field of realism or spectacle, but what it has to give of its own shared experience is being seen not to depend on complex and expensive *mise-en-scène* or on a particular arrangement of the room in which the drama takes place—hence the almost naked stage of the *Fischbecker Wandteppich*, the central position of the stage in the Teatro Sant'Erasmo, and the use of the church or the street for the dramatic encounter. The team of actors has an importance which



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as not had for several hundred years, and with it the work of the dramatist, the quality of the dramatic action; everything else is of diminished importance.

I said the team of actors advisedly and included with them in my mind the producer, of course, and it seems to me that the way to treat drama now as in the age of Shakespeare or Molière is through the closely-knit company with its own methods, traditions, family jokes and mutual understanding, *and its own dramatist or dramatists*. Europe already shows examples of this among the Christian groups: the *Vortoss* in Hamburg has its Albert Thomsen, Tsiropoulos wrote for his own group of young men, as Daniel Atger has done for his and Olaf Hartman for the group at Sigtuna, while the most potent example of this phenomenon from the secular theatre of our age is Bertolt Brecht. It is not simply that the dramatist ought to be intimately familiar with the theatre—Caudel, at the time he wrote most of his plays, would be an important exception to this, if one tried to make it into a rule—but that the greatest drama comes out of an interplay between the writer, the players, the public and the accepted framework of life in any given age.

The breakdown of the hitherto more or less stable form of society, the lack of an "accepted framework" was, as we saw, one of Ghéon's great difficulties at the beginning and the reason why so many Christian would-be dramatists find that their plays are too heavy and full of discourses; for in their first act they have to provide the framework, the Christian setting, as well as unfolding their dramatic action. Probably one reason why the greatest Christian plays of our age have a mediæval setting (*Murder in the Cathedral*, *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, and others) is that this gives the philosophical and social background for the action without further ado: we are all together in the Age of Faith, even, for the time being, the unbelievers in the cast and in the audience. This factor also explains the widespread success and popularity of the many revivals of mediæval plays. The need for a familiar and tenable philosophical basis for all drama may be one reason why our age has seen an outbreak of Christianity in its secular theatre, even in the work of dramatists like Montherlant who are not professing Christians.

The quest for a new "liturgical" drama, of which the Christian plays at Sigtuna are the most sustained and conscious manifestation, is one of the attempts to wean the audience from passivity and induce them to take a living part in the drama. This, at least, is one aspect of the matter. In Spain, where liturgical drama is very old, the popular response is tumultuous and quite spontaneous and simple, and also there is no question about the nature of the assembly and the action in which all are taking part; it is an act of religious cult. I suppose the situation in the northern Lutheran countries is quite different in this respect, because there religion is so much more self-conscious and dissociated from the rest of life than it is in southern Europe. One of



the tasks which the Christian dramatists and producers of the reformed tradition are facing is that of breaking down a certain physical stiffness and reserve specially associated with religious activities, a legacy of the puritan distrust of the body and its natural modes of expression. I am thinking especially of what Mr. van Damm and Madame Chazel say on this point, of the Darmstadt Marienschwesternschaft seeking new ways of expressing worship in movement, and of the work of Mr. Hans-Reudi Weber in teaching the Christian faith to illiterate Indonesians by mimetic methods which they themselves taught him. Mr. Webber is now in Geneva, and further study on these matters is being actively pursued under the auspices of the World Council of Churches.

It is noticeable that liturgical drama, old and new, is at present found only in communities where either the participation of the faithful in the actual liturgical life of the church is weak, i.e., it appears to be to a certain extent a substitute for a full liturgical life. I say this with caution, not forgetting that part of the Swedish Lutheran Church is seeking a fuller liturgical life, especially the part where Director Hartman is. There are also dangers in the association of the idea of a play with that of the real worship of the living God, to which the passage quoted from Dr. Eberle's book on Swiss drama draws attention very forcibly, and it is no longer considered correct to talk of the Mass without qualification, as a drama, as people did in the thirties. The plays developed from the central sermon of a Lutheran service, and the play-motets which have been developed in Germany by the Protestants, do not seem to present the same theoretical danger, but the texts I have seen looked both difficult and uninspired, whereas simplicity allied to soaring lyrical perfection ought to be the mark of a motet. Historically, religious drama developed out of the liturgy, and many of the survivals and revivals bear the marks of this origin very plainly, but it is surely significant that with the sole exception of Elche, all the truly dramatic activities were persuaded by the Church to develop outside the church building and away from the liturgy itself.

*To be concluded.*

## *Notes from the Back Pew*

### **Comfort for Playwrights . . .**

The play has been returned, for the tenth time, with a polite note: "The publishers regret . . ."

Don't despair. Take comfort from the words of Archy, the Cockroach. Archy (you may remember) was a vers-libre poet, re-incarnated as a cockroach for his sins, and he cheered himself up as he struggled with the typewriter, as follows:



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what i have  
always claimed is that manners and methods  
are no great matter compared  
with thoughts in poetry you cant hide  
gems of thought so they wont flash  
on the world on the other hand if you press  
agent poor stuff that wont make it live. . . .

(*"Archy's Life of Mehitabel," by Don Marquis.*)

If the play is really good, no rebuff will hurt it. If not . . . At least, you are not obliged to jump up and down on the keys of your machine make an impression.

### . and Advice to Audiences

Advice is poured onto actors and producers. Audiences are neglected. Enquiries on the other side of the curtain, however, have produced some suggestions for the Back Pew to take to heart.

#### Don't

go round to see the producer either just before or just after the play. The poor fellow is in no state to take in a word you say. Congratulate him the next day, or send a note of appreciation.

#### Don't

give the actors advice on their interpretations between performances. Some startling changes in a performance have been traced to well-meant comments from friends.

#### Don't

make a speech, if you are a clergyman. The Benediction should be enough. "If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue."

*A less serious-minded group adds, Don't*

try to hang your umbrella on the lighting flex. (Yes, that really happened!)

### ie Last Word on Propaganda

A new book on the modern theatre has a chapter on plays-with-a-ssage. It is headed:

HOW TO LOSE FRIENDS BY INFLUENCING PEOPLE.

CAPELLA.

*The extract from "Archy's Life of Mehitabel" is reproduced by permission of Messrs. Faber & Faber Ltd.)*



# *Practical Production for the Novice*

LYN OXENFORD

"Time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted." This Army maxim applies especially to producers. Many production problems would never have arisen if the producer had prepared his play carefully enough in the early stages of his work.

In the last issue of *CHRISTIAN DRAMA*, the article by Christopher Ede stressed the question of standards in religious drama and the right approach to the whole question of producing religious plays. This article will be concerned with suggesting practical methods for carrying out those ideals and ideas.

The choice of play comes first and must be considered both from the point of view of cast and setting. It is good to have a play which encourages the cast to do its best, but too difficult a play is apt to make them feel frustrated. Some people find it hard to judge the point until rehearsals are well on their way and it is apparent that the play has technical difficulties (involved verse, holes in the plot which have to be covered up, or comedy that calls for immaculate timing) that no amount of hard work can overcome. Mr. Ede gives the producer three questions: "What is the play about? How has the author expressed the idea? How best can the idea be conveyed dramatically to an audience of mixed emotional and intellectual powers?"—and from these questions the producer must proceed with practical work to answer them.

First, he must know the answer to the first and second questions before he goes on to the third. Here he must pause and visualise the play and where it is to be played. It is no use choosing a play that can only be effectively done with complicated lighting if there is no equipment available. Some plays demand an intimate setting and would be lost if played in a large church. The producer must know his assets and liabilities and draw up a mental balance-sheet. It might read, for instance, assets: good leading men, good choir, large stage. Liabilities: poor acoustics, little acting talent of large group which must be used. In the latter case, a pageant-type of play had better be chosen which can make its effect by using a crowd in costumes, and choral effects, rather than a play which has six characters who must act well and who would be lost in space.

The setting of the play should be drawn to scale by the producer on a small model stage made complete with any furniture he may need and paper dolls for actors, to scale, so that he can see what the groups are really going to look like. Most dress-rehearsals are chaotic because this has not been done. The chairs are larger, or smaller than expected; the screen is shifted despairingly to and fro so that it does not mask anyone, and the actors get hopelessly bewildered.



because what they have rehearsed differs from what they are now expected to do.

A practical point not always recognised by producers is that of different levels to help them with their grouping: dais of any kind, a few steps up to the door, even a line of ginger-beer crates across the back of the stage, simplify the difficulties of grouping immensely. Chairs of a uniform height make any domestic play look like a committee-meeting, but an armchair, a footstool, a high stool and a rocking-chair help the producer to put his important people in a commanding position.

In each scene one character must catch the attention of the audience (the scene may only last a minute or two) so that character must be in a position in which the audience can easily see him. It is a good idea to decide on the climaxes all through the play, group the characters on stage at these moments and then fill in the moves which lead up to them. This is the type of work that must be done on the scale plan before the rehearsals start. These groups may be altered, of course, if the cast have individual peculiarities (stiff legs, awkwardness and extreme fatness) but these alterations must be carefully written down in the prompt copy. The stage manager should do this and no one should even attempt to produce and stage-manage at the same time.

The producer may decide to set a play realistically or unrealistically, or to play a period play in modern dress in order to overcome some of the liabilities and to give him a wider choice of play. He must, however, *at an early stage* take the stage manager into his confidence, give him authority and work together with him in every possible way. Casting from the Parish Group has its difficulties and the actor should be chosen for the quality he possesses which the part needs, rather than too much attention paid to his experience or lack of it. Balance of voices should be carefully considered if the play has long scenes between two people, so that the monotony of having two actors or actresses with similar voices is avoided.

Rehearsal discipline helps the producer, and he must explain to the cast at the first rehearsal what is expected of them. A rehearsal list which avoids calling actors at 8 o'clock who are not needed until 9.30 is appreciated. The wardrobe-mistress should come to the second rehearsal by which time any personal properties should be decided and some arrangement made for getting them as soon as possible to the actors. A long, silver-headed cane may help a youth to play an old man if he has rehearsed with it; it may merely hinder him if it is not provided until the dress-rehearsal.

The producer of an inexperienced cast will find these personal properties solve many of his cast's difficulties in visualising their parts. He must be ready to give suggestions but must do his best to stimulate the cast to suggest things for themselves.

An obvious comedy point would be for a large man, who was



playing a shy character, to be given a piano-stool to sit on that always sank rapidly. That would be a producer's decision. The same man might decide that it would be funny if he had a cigarette-case that would not open when he had to offer someone a cigarette. This idea ought to come from the actor. The first would affect the positioning of the other actors—the second would not. This makes clear where the responsibility of the decision lies.

The producer can rehearse a tricky scene four times and gain results if he warns the cast this is to be done. If he simply goes over it four times, the cast becomes nervous and sometimes resentful, feeling that the producer is being fussy or that they are failing him.

If the atmosphere of the scene is coming over but there is some masking, it is better not to break in but to check up on mechanics when the actors are not emotionally wrought up.

A definite date should be set for words to be learnt, so that the prompter gets a chance to rehearse too, to mark the pauses and to learn the flow of the play. Public prompting will make many actors learn his words and books should be ruthlessly confiscated with the soothing remark that the actor must learn to take a prompt and the rest of the cast to cope with emergencies.

At this stage the play should be taking shape. The contrasts of quiet scenes and noisy scenes, dramatic entrances and unobtrusive entrances, dramatic pauses and quickening quarrels, building up to climax, should begin to emerge. This cannot happen while the actors are fumbling for their words but should proceed apace after books are discarded. Practical properties such as teacups or banquet dishes should be introduced when the actors have ceased to hold their books. If actors see the immediate advantage and realise the practical reasons for no books, they will be more willing to make an effort with word learning.

A prayer to start every rehearsal reminds the cast why they have assembled and to whom they are offering their work. After this, the prompt may take a word-rehearsal while the producer checks up with the stage-manager and any other technical staff on technical details. Many questions of properties, wardrobe and lighting are better settled at the start of a rehearsal rather than hurriedly discussed while the caretaker is hustling everyone out of the hall.

It is sometimes discovered, at a late stage of rehearsals, that a promised door is not available or that a special spotlight that affects the grouping cannot, after all, be obtained. If the discovery is made at the beginning of the rehearsal, suitable adjustments can be made during it and much valuable time be saved.

The polishing of a production cannot be done until the actors are entirely certain of words and moves, and many productions are seen which are clearly unready for public performance because the producer has never had the opportunity to polish them. Here the responsibility lies clearly on the heads of the actors. The state of affairs must be



id squarely in front of them, with a reminder that it *is* Religious drama and therefore must be as good as possible.

Two dress-rehearsals and a separate lighting-rehearsal are worth a good deal of bribery to achieve and the producer must use his ingenuity to the utmost for this end.

The music which is to take the curtain up and bring it down (even where there is no incidental music) should be carefully chosen and the cast should hear it so as to be prepared for it. Any curtain-call should be rehearsed carefully. Make-up should be discussed and the stage-manager should tell the cast what effect his lighting will have on the colours of their make-up.

Lighting is too vast a subject to go into here, except for a reminder that it is only necessary to light the area of the stage where acting takes place. A stage brilliantly lit, with an even light for the whole play, looks dull and tires the eyes of the audience. No one need despair if elaborate lighting-equipment is not available; a very little knowledge plus commonsense and an eye for dramatic effect can dissolve almost any difficulty. Plays have been admirably lighted in halls where there was no electricity at all, so no one need rely on modern methods, though it is admittedly fun to play with adequate equipment.

The remark at the beginning of this article in the paragraph on choice of play applies to plays that need complicated black-outs which may easily go wrong with improvised lighting. The producer who chooses a play of this type and has little or no lighting available will spend a disproportionate allowance of his time on solving technical problems. If that is his idea of fun, then no one need cavil—but he has been warned!

It helps the producer to *watch* one run-through of the play without lighting; then he can *listen* to one run-through without watching. This is an easy way to pick out the patches that are dull. He can see where the picture is not making the situation clear to the audience because the actors are relying on the words to carry the scene. He can then hear where the voices are becoming dull and monotonous; often in a narrative passage which must be broken up more, as it contains knowledge that the audience must grasp if they are to understand the plot. Any plot lines must be stressed, either by the movement or the coupling, and audibility must be insisted upon by the producer.

The finale of the play is usually most sketchily rehearsed; sometimes the cast have only been through it once before the dress-rehearsal; sometimes (how be it spoken) they have *not* been through before the dress-rehearsal. This is the worst mistake of all. The whole play should build up to its final climax, because on this climax rests the shape of the play. If it is a climax of noise, and there have been other climaxes of noise in the play, the finale should have more volume than the others. The climax should be introduced to the cast, not finally set, about half-way through the rehearsals of a large act, so that they see the target of the play. Even if it means skipping



the middle part (which can be set later) the climax must be properly rehearsed. The cast must finish the play with firmness and attack. They will find the actual performance tiring, will tend to flag towards the end, and if they are at all uncertain as to how it is to end, the play will droop miserably and may even go to pieces altogether before the curtain falls.

Finally, all producers realise how much hard work is needed to put on a play, but actors usually do not. The producer has to inspire, cajole, bully and charm his cast into putting their best work into a worthwhile cause. Vitality and excitement can carry a play over many a technical hitch; technical perfection cannot, alone, carry a play to triumphant performance. Foresight will serve a producer far better than last-minute inspiration. He must plan and proceed according to plan if he is to take the citadel with triumph.

Here is a list of clear and helpful books on the aspects of production mentioned in this article:

"The Play Produced" .. .. .	John Fernald
"The Amateur Actor" .. .. .	J. F. Mackenzie
"Noises Off" .. .. .	F. Napier
"Curtain Settings for the Small Stage" ..	F. Napier
"Guide to Greasepaint" .. .. .	A. Stanley
"Lighting for the Amateur Stage" ..	Angus Wilson
"Design for Movement" .. .. .	Lyn Oxenford

## NEW PLAYS

### Christmas with St. Francis

FREDA COLLINS, Author of *The Christmas Story*, etc.

Eleven male and seven female speaking parts. Runs for 35 minutes. Props, costumes and lighting are of the simplest. The action culminates in the procession on Christmas Eve to the cave-crib. 2s.

### A Christmas Pageant

KATHLEEN MCLEAN, Author of *Biblical Plays for Young People*.

Twenty speaking parts, as well as extras. Notes and diagrams on costumes, etc., are provided. The action takes the form of a mediæval Christmas pageant presented by a wandering troupe to a rustic audience. 2s.

### The Masque of Everyman

PETER FISON, Lecturer in English at Uppsala University.

The theme is that of *Everyman* (in a modern context), and deals with a parish priest's self-questioning search for truth. Designed for performance on television, it will lose little in the way of action when read as "straight" poetry. A brilliant and original work. 5s.

**MOWBRAYS** 28 Margaret St., London, W.1.



## *Report on International Committee on Religious Drama*

NICE, FRANCE—15th to 18th JULY, 1956

At the International Conference held at Oxford last year, a small representative Committee was appointed to meet during the years until the next Conference. This Committee met at NICE on July 15th, 1956, at the generous invitation of Mme. Chazel who provided hospitality, and made all arrangements for the smooth running of the committee meetings.

Delegates present:—

Pastor W. Barnard, Holland; Herr Horst Behrend, Germany; E. Martin Browne, Esq., Great Britain and U.S.A.; Madame L. Chazel, France; Pastor Olov Hartman, Sweden; Dr. Edmund Stadler, Switzerland; Miss Carina Robins, Secretary to the Committee.

### *Plan for Future Conferences.*

It was agreed that either an enlarged committee or a small conference should meet in Germany in 1958, and that a full conference should meet in Switzerland in 1960.

The 1958 Committee should be held from August 1st to 6th. Mr. Horst Behrend will endeavour to make as economical arrangements as possible in Berlin or some other German town. It must be a working committee or conference to make preparations for 1960. In addition to the six delegates present at Nice, delegates should be invited from the U.S.A., Spain, Italy, and probably the Far East. Miss Robins to act as Secretary.

The development of International Religious Drama depends to a great extent upon the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation and the continuation of its support. The size of the 1958 Committee must depend upon finance, and great economy should be exercised.

Mr. Behrend hopes to arrange for a small German festival of religious drama to take place during the Committee's visit.

The 1960 Conference. This would coincide with "The Great Theatre of the World" which is played in the open air at Einseideln in Switzerland every five years, also the Oberammergau Passion Play. The Committee suggested that an International Festival of Religious Drama should be planned at Zurich or wherever in Switzerland the Conference meets, companies to be invited from as many countries as possible including the U.S.A.

Dr. Stadler will see what arrangements can be made for the holding of such a Conference and Festival in Switzerland.

### *Miss Joan Ford's Report on Religious Drama in Europe. Winter, 1955—1956.*

The delegates considered that Miss Ford had accomplished a great deal in a short time. They agreed that the report should be presented as a personal impression and not as a factual statement. They stressed the need for all those really concerned with religious drama in every country to read this report in full, and they hoped that every delegate who had been present at the Oxford International Conference in 1955 would buy a copy and consider the distribution of additional copies. Copies of this report, covering 119 duplicated pages, are available at the R.D.S. Office at 7s.6d. each, sterling.

It was agreed that a series of articles should be published in CHRISTIAN DRAMA, dealing with the most important subjects of general interest, and those articles should form the basis of discussions both in 1958 and 1960.



# “*The Way of the Cross*”

*Thoughts on production* by URSULA NICHOLL

This play was written for five actors, two men, two women and a reciter, as part of the larger play *The Mystery of the Finding of the Cross*, and it was first performed by “Les Compagnons de Jeux” at Tancrémont in Belgium. The set was composed of a number of different levels with steps leading up to each, on which the actors were grouped in formal geometrical patterns which changed with the action of the play. The acting was highly stylised, the players emphasising great depth of emotion primarily through restraint.

The play is entirely flexible, and can be played by as many or as few actors as the producer wills. The lines are interpretable in a number of ways, and there is endless scope for individual understanding and imagination, so that a prospective producer must decide on the type of technique he will adopt. The following are some hints from the experience of one producer, on how to begin and why.

Decide on the number of players. Study the script, and distribute the lines according to your numbers, deciding on the mood of every line, and decide whether it is good or evil. You must, however, maintain a valid dramatic balance (always remembering the predominance of evil in the world). Look for the meaning, mood, climax, speed and tension of each Station, and then look at the play as a whole from the same angles. A different sin can be emphasised in each Station: for example, Station VII: Indifference . . .

“What will become of the fortunate and strong, the rich and the healthy, if they give themselves only to the misery of others?”

Station IX: Lust . . .

“We have drawn poison even from honey and manna.

From the honey of wedlock and the manna of rest.”)

Study the quatrain at the beginning of each Station. This represents the “outside view,” the knowing what must happen, the stating of fact without personal emotion. Each one has a different construction varying in length of line, light and dark vowels, and pulse beat, yet each taking the same length of time to speak. The mood of each station is built by these structural means. They warrant much study.

The actors then “play out” what the reciter has foretold, in all its beauty and its violence. Finally, the repetition of the four initial lines at the end of each Station is the acceptance by the players, and the audience, of the responsibility for man’s sin. Bestiality, indifference, lust, pride, all these contributed to Our Lord’s sufferings, and through these sins we crucify Him again to-day. So within the stylised framework of the quatrain and its repetition, the action of each Station should be realistically played, always remembering that the split-second changes of mood demand a certain formalised approach, the players being types rather than characters. The miming of the nailing and



the reactions of the crowd, the sorrow and understanding of the Mother, the Magdalene, and John, must not be softened or minimised; nor must it be forgotten that throughout runs a thread of spiritual awareness which becomes in the last two Stations pure worship.

The action should take place on a number of elevations of varying height, with one higher than the rest to represent Golgotha. These can be built from wooden beer-boxes covered with neutral-coloured material. If they are in a church, they should be so arranged as to appear as part of the architecture, and not to mask the altar. The grouping of the players should, at every moment, present a perfect picture, using the different heights to their full advantage, and every player should know to the half-inch his place on the set at any point and find his way there without hesitation . . . and I mean literally, to the half-inch, as even one head out of alignment can ruin the whole effect.

The grouping should vary in every Station, directing the eye in each case to a different part of the stage. The whole essence of the play is that the audience should be able to see the unseen Figure of the Christ throughout the action through the eyes of the players, and someone should "stand-in" for the first few rehearsals to give the feeling of place and height, and the angle of the burden of the Cross, which can at first be represented by some heavy piece of wood. The actors should be so trained that they still see the figure after the "stand-in" and the Cross have gone, and not just look more or less in the correct direction. The positions of the Stations about the acting area can follow a logical sequence, as if upon the road to Calvary, or alternatively, follow a "production sequence" where each scene is viewed from a different angle, but in either case the sequence must be dramatically valid. You must be able to give a logical reason for what you have decided to do.

The lighting should follow in colour and intensity the mood of each Station, and concentrate on that acting area most in use at any one time. If five pageant lanterns or spots are used with different coloured gelatine in each, the colouring in each Station can be varied by altering the *intensity* of light in any one, or two, lamps, the action being concentrated in the area of greatest light. Floods should not be used, as there is too much overspill from the acting area.

Costume should be uniform so that the players are a team, but the design can vary from modern dress to a simple stylised garment. The colour scheme could be black and white; the liturgical colours of the Passion; deep, rich shades, or, in fact, any scheme which symbolises the atmosphere of the play.

Music can be used as a link between the Stations, or not, but should be chosen with care, and should always be subservient to the action. This should be rehearsed as carefully as the rest of the production.

Every actor must be so rehearsed (it cannot be too strongly emphasised) that he knows to a fraction where he is on the set at any given moment, and his relationship in time and mood to the rest of



the cast. The play is entirely a matter of team work, and no one more important than another. The players should become such dedicated whole that it should not be necessary to arrange any sign to break the silence at the end of each Station, the right moment being felt by the actors themselves (possibly a different actor each night).

This play is a devotion, and the pauses marked in the script should be observed to the full. This allows time for the audience to identify themselves with the meaning of the play.

Any prospective producer must choose his interpretation, see the light on the far horizon, and by hours of concentration, hard work and endless prayer, work towards his vision. Every thought and action about this play by both producer and actors should be so founded on prayer that in rehearsal the players can turn their full attention to the material necessities of production and acting, and yet still be conditioned to the spiritual content.

Anyone who has performed in or seen *The Way of the Cross* will realise with increasing intensity the depth and strength of its message. It makes a devotional preparation for Holy Week for both players and audience, whose understanding grows with every performance and is, indeed, the very essence of religious drama.

Henri Ghéon himself wrote in the preface to the French text the following note to prospective producers of his play: "The problem of producing *The Way of the Cross* is not without difficulties; but it is not impossible to solve them, as our experience has shown. Rigorous hard work is indispensable in the first place . . . but crowned with great faith and great love. This is the only secret of the success of the Compagnons. Following the same plan, the most unpretentious production is certain to succeed"—but it needs playing stark and strong. The audience should be moved deeper than tears, in fact to the searching of their souls.

THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

TO BE HELD

On FRIDAY, 30th NOVEMBER, 1956

BEGINNING AT 11.30 A.M. AT

THE HORSESHOE HOTEL

TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD, LONDON, W.1

Details will be sent to members later

**BUFFET LUNCH**



## *Campaign for Membership*

CARINA ROBINS

Our readers have already heard about our drive to double the membership of the Society. I want to tell you more about it and to ask for your co-operation. David Linnell, Ursula Nicholl and myself have been continuing the drive in various ways throughout the summer, but unfortunately David Linnell must leave us at the end of October, so we need the help of our members more than ever before.

One of our methods is to go to a promising area, whether it be Wexham or Kent, stay with a long-suffering friend for a few days, and with the help of the local members, to visit as many key people as possible. We find out what is going on in the way of religious drama, suggest short training courses, festivals, productions, and other activities, and perhaps the formation of a Branch of the Society in that locality. We offer the services of the Society as tutors, adjudicators, producers, and so on. In return we ask that every church will include the Society and its work in that church's list of missionary bodies needing regular support by prayer, by collections, and by membership. Now may we ask our readers whether they can help us in any or all the following ways:—

1. If you live in a convenient area, could you invite Miss Nicholl or myself to stay a few days, and, with your co-operation, to tackle your locality?
2. Will you write to us for some of our yellow membership leaflets, and armed with these, do all you can to persuade your own church, dramatic society, youth club, and your individual friends to support us by prayer and membership?
3. At least **WILL YOU GET ONE NEW MEMBER?**
4. Will you remember us regularly in your prayers?

Opportunities for the development of our work and improvement of our services are presenting themselves in many directions. The generosity of our friends is most heart-warming, but now we must look for far greater support in order to grow.



## Play Study Scheme

REV. W. M. MERCHANT

A good deal of hard work was put in by the "Research Group" at Winchester and it seemed a pity that it should not be followed up by some quiet home study. So the idea grew of a monthly circular which should treat a play briefly, giving both a short criticism of it (which you may well disagree violently!) and some lines for profitable study. At the end of each criticism there will be a bibliography which can be used in full or completely ignored, or you can pick and choose as your leisure or fancy dictate.

The series for the first year has been carefully planned to give as much variety as possible. Religious drama has a long and fascinating history. Fragments of it may still be found in the Old Testament; it was a major dramatic literature in ancient Greece. In Christian times England has been especially rich in religious drama and any student, however unspecialised in interest, will find material to study from mediæval times, in Shakespeare's age, in the period of Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley, or of Tennyson and Browning. We need scarcely be reminded of to-day's renaissance, with Eliot, Fry and Churchill, Williams transfiguring the history of this drama.

But it would be dull and pedantic to treat the whole thing chronologically; instead we shall move freely, play by play, month by month, crossing the centuries, beginning perhaps with the sceptical Byron *Cain*, going back over two thousand years to the *Antigone* of Sophocles, then coming forward a thousand years to the second *Walden* of *field Shepherd's Play*. *King Lear* may find itself next-door neighbour to Christopher Fry's *The Dark is Light Enough*, *The Revenger's Tragedy* rubs shoulders with *The Family Reunion*, while Tennyson's *Becket* throws light on *Murder in the Cathedral*. There should be something for everyone.

### OFFICE NOTES

#### *How to Join.*

Those wishing to take part in this scheme and to receive the monthly notes prepared by the Rev. M. Merchant should notify Headquarters office and enclose ten shillings which covers stencilling, postage, etc., for the first year's notes.

We expect to send out the first circular in January, 1957. Please notify us not later than 10th December.



# *The Tenth National School of Religious Drama*

AUGUST, 1956

(I)

The 160 students who attended this school included several overseas visitors including people from Australia, Holland, Uganda and U.S.A. King Alfred's College, Winchester, was a happy choice, for it provided a beautiful chapel, a fine hall and stage, a gymnasium for the country dancing, tennis courts, a smiling staff and excellent food. Its situation enabled many to visit Winchester and Salisbury Cathedrals (at Salisbury a large party was entertained at tea by the Religious Drama Fellowship), Romsey Abbey and Stonehenge.

The two Chaplains, the Rev. P. Turner (Anglican) and the Rev. C. Stanley Jones (Free Church), both of whom are intimately concerned with Religious Drama, took the daily services and were constantly at the disposal of any who might wish to consult them. A joyful united service of thanksgiving was held on Sunday evening.

The theme of this year's school was the Relationship between Theology and the Arts, and the simplest way to try to assess what was gained is to begin at the end, and to start with the last night's discussion on "Where has the School's Theme led us?" Each Tutor made the first of what had materialised in their own groups.

Mr. Merchant had pleaded for a deeper understanding and penetration of our artistic heritage and for a more profound study of the great masters of creative art in the theatre. Thus stimulated, we shall convey to others something of the glorious magnitude of the Eternal. We are caught up in something larger than ourselves.

In the Movement Group *Patricia Arnold's* purpose had been to show how through the discipline of strict form freedom was gained. The imaginative "Journey—a Project in Movement," created by students and tutor, was based on a pattern, and through disciplined concentration a unified group emerged.

*Graham Suter's* aim had been to cover the essential work of producer and actor and to show how we could serve our faith by Christian plays which interpreted Christianity to the audience, and to remind us that we were servants in the work of God, drama and mankind. Certainly the demonstration of experimental plays improvised for performance on a cart in the street opened up new ideas, and showed what possibilities lie in this type of drama.

*John Blatchley* was out to inculcate in producers and actors the sense of the honour due to the play and to the author. *Giving* was the essence of worship and through giving themselves in the drama the Religious Drama Society groups attempt to worship God.

*Jrsula Nicholl*, who rehearsed excerpts from the "Oresteia," had



attempted to take one of the earliest forms of Religious Drama and to see what in it is valuable to us now. Sin and expiation as a theme has eternal significance, and the old form was used to show it to the modern mind. It had also been useful as an exercise in a style of acting which could be used for modern Religious Drama.

*Pamela Keily* spoke of the discipline that was necessary if actors were to share their convictions with the audience. The work must be done humbly, in unity of spirit, working to pattern. Those who took part in the demonstration of a condensed version of "Christ in the Concrete City," most definitely conveyed that sense of unity and conviction to the audience.

*Christopher le Fleming* emphasised the value of music in adding expression to that which can be given in words. He pleaded that troups should be taken to find worthy and suitable music for dramatic use.

Lectures were given by *Stella Mary Pearce* (Art), *K. M. Baxter* (Poetry), *John Blatchley* (The Theatre: a point of view), and *Christopher le Fleming* (The use of Music in Religious Drama). *Pastor Barnard* spoke of the snares that lie in wait to trap a translator, and *Joan Ford* told something of her experiences when roaming Europe in search of Religious Drama. On the Sunday evening *Elizabeth Crawford* (Soprano), and *Christopher le Fleming* at the piano, gave a varied and delightful recital. The director of music was always at hand to provide just the right music at a moment's notice for an occasion. Although our new Chairman of Executive, *Mrs. K. Baxter*, was unable to stay for the whole school her presence for a few days at the beginning and the end was much appreciated.

Again and again students spoke with gratitude of the way in which the Tutors, instead of seeking rest and solitude after their strenuous classes, entered into the general life of the school, sharing the tedium and fun; ready at all times to have their brains picked and to give informal advice.

A Students' Concert, consisting of piano solos, songs and recitation was held during the week. The last night's Revels included music from the North and action songs from Holland; but the high-light was the very funny "True Moralitie": "The Enlargement of Arte," specially written for the occasion, and featuring the villain "Impropaganda."

On Wednesday morning the students dispersed brim-full of plans and ideas which by this time, no doubt, they are trying out in their home towns and villages.

AN ONLOOKER

## (II)

*No Summer School would be complete without a contingent of friends from County Durham. The youngest of the "Durhamites" of Winchester writes:*

"I had never been to a Summer School before, and it was only after hard persuasion that I decided to come to Winchester—I defy anyone to try to keep me away next year!



'Of course, we all had a wonderful time, whether we 'enjoyed the group work, endured the lectures and lived for the dances'; threw ourselves (literally and metaphorically) into everything; or just sat untrusively to marvel at the 'weird movements coaxed from the most promising bodies' and the fascinating variety of sounds issuing from different quarters throughout the day.

'The key-note of the school, for me, was intensity, of the peculiar 'door opening' quality mentioned by several speakers in the final discussion. Every separate sphere of activity was highly individual and concentrated; yet the intensity of the whole atmosphere lay in the discipline which was so stressed by our tutors and chaplains. Once I thoroughly grasped the idea that these different spheres were integral parts of a single pattern, I felt that I was on the edge of something tremendous. I know I was far from alone in my experience and discoveries.

'We can only say, 'Thank you' to our tutors and chaplains for the new standards, new vision and new knowledge, which made the school such a memorable one, and to everyone else for the 'Food, Fun and Fellowship' which made it such a happy one.

"JUDITH ANN ROBINSON,

"*Durhamite.*"

*Note.*—It is hoped to publish in the next issue of CHRISTIAN DRAMA an account of the experiments in the improvised street drama made at Winchester.

## *Next Year's Summer School*

CARINA ROBINS, *Schools Organiser.*

We have booked the University College of North Staffordshire, known as Keele College, for our annual Summer School of Religious Drama, from Tuesday, August 20th to Thursday, August 29th, 1957. I was most impressed when I visited the college recently, for the site is magnificent. Six hundred feet up, it looks south and west over the Staffordshire border towards Shropshire and the Wrekin. Two hundred acres of park and woodland have provided a site unsurpassed in the country for a university college. Keele Hall was for over three hundred and fifty years the seat of the Sneyd family—from 1580 until 1949 it was acquired by the college. The park includes twenty-six acres of playing fields, four lakes and woodlands.

Many members will have read with interest of the experiment in university education made by this College. The prime object of the training is to break down the rigid departmentalism and undue specialisation which has grown up at many other universities. Princess Margaret is the President, and it is a four-year course for men and women. The aim is implemented not only by the arrangement



of studies but also by the College being wholly residential. So the Summer School of Religious Drama will be going to the scene of some of the liveliest experiments in English University education.

Keele Hall itself will provide us with the refectory, but we shall need more modern buildings for other purposes. A fine assembly hall with stage and several adjoining rehearsal rooms are in process of being built in the park. The Chapel is in a Nissen hut, and the common room likewise, both well furnished. Around these buildings are the huts which at present provide the student accommodation. Converted from army huts they are most comfortably furnished, each hut consisting of five bedsitting rooms (with Dunlopillo mattresses), bathroom, washroom, etc. For excursions, there are the Peak District, Charnworth, and Haddon Hall.

Accounts of our tenth Summer School held at Winchester in August appear elsewhere in this magazine. These schools become increasingly important in the life of the Society, for indirectly they are responsible for much of the development of religious drama throughout the country and overseas. Some of the tutors and chaplains have become permanent friends of the Society, and are helping by the various gifts to enrich our understanding and improve our standards.

Winchester was perhaps the happiest and most valuable School we have had yet, and now, already, while memories are still fresh in our minds, we are making plans for next year's course. An attractive leaflet with a photograph of Keele College, if not enclosed in this number of *CHRISTIAN DRAMA*, will be ready shortly. We hope that you will plan your next year's holiday to include the Summer School, and that you will help us to make it known by distributing this magazine and the leaflet to your friends.

## *The New Pilgrim Players' Tour*

SEPTEMBER, 1955—MARCH, 1956

PAMELA KEILY

Three and a half years "on the road" are becoming hard to realise now that life has changed its contours so completely; yet before the whole phantasmagoria fades right away, it is perhaps time to look back over the last Pilgrim season.

It was good to terminate on the crest of the wave as regards our performances—even if financially we were in the trough. I dare not say "crest," because I believe our last two plays were attempting to do what the company existed to do, and were a nicely balanced programme for church and hall.

"Communication" is the word that ties one to many another activity within the church to-day—"the problem of communication," of meeting people, "where they are," in language comprehensible to them and so arresting their attention by the fact that what is being said



ne has got something to do with them in life as they know it. This (in my opinion), was most nearly achieved in our final tour.

Starting at the end of last October, with the usual absence of time for rehearsal or play, we revived "Holy Family" since advance booking had allowed of us no delay in decision. This meant engaging five men and three women and a stage-manager when we had hoped to economise by having a company of six. It also meant that a team had to be re-created, since only three members of the previous company remained.

We were to cover new ground in Lincolnshire through November and then were due in Scarborough and Middlesborough which had never seen this production. The haunting fact was that "two new plays" were booked for the end of January in South Wales and that neither script was complete when we set out on the road. Nor were the proposed new plays possible to cast rightly from the very young group who were putting over "Holy Family." One was to be a revised version of "Showdown," made possible for a company of six; the other a new play for church requiring three men and two women at the height of emotional stress.

"Outer London" was booked for "Holy Family." Fog was the difficulty on one or two evenings, though never to the extent of cancellation.

On January 25th, we moved from Barnes and the kindly wing of the Vicar of Holy Trinity, playing a matinee in Guildford Cathedral, before we reached Southsea. There we played "Holy Family" for one week, said good-bye to three actors, and rehearsed feverishly for the two new shows.

We managed to give public dress-rehearsals before moving at the end of the month. The two new productions seemed unquestionably to fit the bill since this was our second visit to Portsmouth, and relations indicated that we were now beginning to do what was wanted. The thriller of a kind suited to the newspaper mentality of to-day, revised for performance in church and of unquestionable theology was something new. It was also intensely dramatic, and being naturalistic in technique, equally intensely difficult for young actors to put over in church. Success varied according to the building.

The new "Showdown" was an enormous improvement on the old version. The day after its dress-rehearsal, we moved to South Wales and launched the two productions.

By now, news of the Pilgrims' impending closure was public, and it was extraordinarily encouraging to see the instantaneous reaction. At Swansea there was an immediate decision to hold a meeting and see what money could be guaranteed. In Cardiff there were splendid reactions to the productions. Then we went on to Birmingham, snow and bitter cold, and a consequent result on the audiences. From there we journeyed to Maryport for our final week, when "Showdown" again seemed to carry the day.



Certain comments remain in one's mind. One hard-working parish priest in Birmingham saying, "You don't know how hard we shall be praying for this work to continue." Amateurs in Cardiff saying, "Without the Pilgrims we would never have reached the standard we've now got for the local work." Another on the telephone declaring it to be absurd that the church should allow such a venture to start for lack of £1,000 a year. Another in Scarborough trying to devise every possible means of enriching our finance. Another in Portsmouth working out a scheme for guaranteed subscriptions from parishes. But now the die was cast and our debt to R.D.S. becoming continually heavier.

Were we worth while? I hope so—though as director of the company I am powerless to say to what extent the contest has brought lasting fruit. But I can say how great a thrill it brought to us to meet such constant warmth of welcome up and down the country. Our financial debt to R.D.S. is great; our debt to hosts and hostesses is more impossible to repay.

And what but the miraculous could have kept us in existence for so long?

## *"The Trial of Thomas Cranmer"*

CARINA ROBINS

"The Trial of Thomas Cranmer" a chronicle verse play by Anne Ridler, was performed in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford in May. The play, commissioned by the Vicar, was presented in the same building where, four hundred years ago, Cranmer was tried and sentenced to be burnt as a heretic.

Anne Ridler has contrived, with great skill, to portray faithfully the historic events of the last few years of the Archbishop's life, compressing the story into the minimum of well-contrasted scenes. The verse serves the mood of the moment, flowing easily from one style to another, rising to heights of dramatic power at crucial points. And the actors spoke well obviously enjoying the language, and we were caught up into the story, being moved to pity, anxiety and horror, as the play demanded.

Professionals, playing some of the principal parts gave the necessary power to the performance. They were well supported by amateurs. In fact, the whole production was on a high level.

Frank Windsor played Cranmer with understanding and dignity. He has a fine voice, which he used skilfully to bring out the contrasting moods of this great man. It was a moving performance. Yet I felt that I should have been even more moved, if we had been allowed to see the Archbishop sink to even greater depths of weakness and despair at the hands of his two Spanish tormentors.

One of the most effective moments earlier in the play was when



anmer, in his prison turret (the pulpit), joins in spirit with his two  
ar friends, Ridley and Latimer, as they go to their death.

"I shall feel your pains in my body, so perhaps  
I may suffer, not only with, but instead of you  
In some part at least . . ."

One is reminded here, of Charles Williams's formulation of the  
ctrine of exchange.

Ralph Morice, Cranmer's secretary, gave a good performance, con-  
ncing in its quiet restraint. Anthony Jacobs as Edmund Bonner,  
shop of London, played his devilish part with vitriolic enjoyment.  
d Hugh Latimer won our pity and admiration, and Margaret and  
eg, the Archbishop's wife and daughter, provided the gentle feminine  
uch. Derek Hart as the Witness did his utmost with a difficult task.  
he dramatist used this modern character as chorus to link scenes  
d to link history with to-day. He was a likeable person and yet he  
emed to get in the way. In fact this device was not entirely  
uccessful.

The play rose to a splendid climax as Thomas tore up his recantation  
d was hustled away to the stake. I wished the play had ended with  
orice's words "to Thy faithful people, pardon and peace," for the  
st seemed anti-climax and unnecessary.

Mr. Roy Porter, the producer, had made good use of the church,  
ecting small stages around the pulpit on one side, and the pillar on  
e other, thus leaving the centre clear for a glimpse of the altar at the  
d. No screens, and the minimum of furniture, the whole church  
eing used for entrances, processions, etc. As I was present at an  
fternoon performance I could not see the full lighting effects, but  
is did not matter. The audience of children was held in rapt attention  
roughout.

It was refreshing to see such a truly Christian interpretation of  
story, and we must hope for more plays by Mrs. Ridler.

## "*The Family Reunion*"

J. DAVIDSON

The Paul Schofield—Peter Brook season at the Phoenix Theatre  
oncluded with T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, with Paul Schofield  
s Harry Monchensey, Dame Sybil Thorndike as Amy and Gwen  
frangçon Davies as Agatha. The theatre-going public showed by its  
upport a true appreciation of this welcome revival.

*The Family Reunion* was first produced in 1939, just before the out-  
reak of war, and it has never received the attention given to *Murder*  
*in the Cathedral* or the post-war plays. Mr. Eliot himself, on looking  
ack at it, finds features in the play that he would handle differently  
o-day.



## CHRISTIAN DRAMA

It was his first experiment in writing verse drama about a contemporary domestic situation. He constructs a modern Orestes, who has grown up under the shadow of an unexplained family crime that has poisoned both the home ("Wishwood was always a cold place") and his capacity for love. He married a wife he found he could not love, and when she was accidentally killed, the hidden forces in his mind overwhelmed him with the conviction that he had murdered her.

Pursued by the Furies of guilt, he returns home expecting to find quietude, only to discover that it is here that the Furies become visible. It is only when he is brought to understand fully the things that affected his childhood, that he finds release from his obsession.

Despite this new freedom, the Furies are still there; but they are transformed into the Eumenides, the "bright angels," whom he must follow to an unknown destiny of expiation.

There is, of course, a much greater richness of meaning in the play than can be conveyed in a few brief sentences. Its complexity, allowing of several interpretations according to the listener's own personal approach, is the cause of both its difficulty and its fascination. Harry has much in common with Hamlet, as well as with Orestes.

Peter Brook, as producer, should have been ideal in bringing out the "good theatre" of the play, judging by the way in which he created a masterpiece of dramatic suspense from the last act of *Measure for Measure*. It was therefore all the more disappointing to find a certain lack of clarity, leading to some confusion and a slowness of pace. The setting was undistinguished, and the Furies (though heralded with terrifying skill) were neither alarming as the Erinyes nor awe-inspiring as the Eumenides.

The choral passages for the Aunts and Uncles were excellently produced and acted, and the audience received them with quick understanding. There were some fine moments in the chief performances. The interview between Harry and Mary was moving, and the figure of Amy was unforgettable, especially in her scene of recrimination with Agatha—the white-haired matriarch in her black velvet gown, shaking with a hatred and grief that her weakened body could no longer control. In this production, she became central to the play, and one is grateful for such a memorable performance.

Above all, the brooding, overcharged atmosphere of the great house was conveyed; Wishwood is in effect a leading character in *The Family Reunion*, and whether diffused in the blue twilight of the rooms, or sharply focused in Amy, its presence pervaded the whole of the action.



# ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

## NEW PLAYS

**Christian Flarepath.** H. C. Fitzer. (Church Information Board, 1/6.) X. Cont. act. 1 adult (Vicar or Rector), large cast of children. A children's pageant for Anglican churches, showing "how the Church provides the means of grace which they need to help them on their journey": Child meets the Guardians of the Font, the Bible, Confirmation, etc. Directions for production are included. (No fee.)

**Ther, forgive them . . .** Winifred Oura. (Typescript.) H. 2 acts (5 scenes), Epilogue. 22m., 8w., Angel.

A Passion Play in modern prose. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**The Foot of the Cross.** A. A. Baker. (Typescript.) XH. 1 act. 3m., 2w. A short Passion Play toured in Staffordshire at Easter, 1956. It is set on a cart, at the ninth hour. Though the Penitent Thief takes part in the action, the figure of our Lord Himself is not seen by the audience. (Fee: 5/-.)

**What He Gave.** J. H. Henderson. (Typescript.) XH. Cont. act. (2 parts.) 5m., 4w.

A Passion Play on "the Biblical theme of self-giving," traced through the Old and New Testaments to the Cross. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**Man's End.** P. J. Turner. (Typescript.) Cart play. 1 act. 6m., 3w., chorus of 6 neighbours.

The now celebrated play by the author of "Christ in the Concrete City." was first performed on a cart in the open air during a Mission in Armley, Leeds, and has since been given in Poplar, and elsewhere.

The play shows the impact of the Church and its teaching on a growing boy, and on his unbelieving parents when he is killed in an accident. Around him are personified forces, unseen until the climax: Paul Pride, Letty Lust, Frank K. World-Pressure, and Connie Conscience. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**Man's Need.** Joyce Prior. (Typescript.) H. 6 scenes, Prologue and Epilogue. Large cast.

A dramatised sequence from the book "Hungry Men," by Leonard Hurst, about our need for food, health, etc., leading to the universal need for God. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**The Man with the Cross.** A. A. Baker. (Typescript.) H. Cont. act. 3w., crowd of women.

A Passion Play for a female cast.

Stylised passages for the three Maries are set against the realism of the crowd, which is of primary importance. The personal reactions of individuals are co-ordinated into a total picture of the Jerusalem crowd at the Trial and Crucifixion of Christ. The play is an experiment, but a section of it was tried out and favourably received at the Winchester Summer School. Cyclostyled copies will be obtainable shortly. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**My Brother's Keeper.** Raymond Chapman. (Typescript.) HX. Cont. act. 3m., 1w., Voices.

An original verse treatment of the story of the murder of Abel. It is vividly written, somewhat in the Christopher Fry manner, and was successfully produced from a centre in Coventry this year. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**Peace in Royal David's City.** Winifred Oura. (Typescript.) H. 6 scenes. Large mixed cast. A Nativity Play in modern prose. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)



## ALSO ADDED

**Isolation at Eyam.** Joyce Dennys. (French, 1/6.) pub. 1954. H. 1 act. 9

The true story of the heroism of a Derbyshire village during the Great Plague. Led by the Vicar and his wife, the villagers decided to remain together, rather than to flee and spread the infection.

This play has already proved itself at Drama Festivals, and is recommended to R.D. groups looking for a short play for women. (Fee: £1 1s.0d.)

## REFERENCE LIBRARY

**Les Evangiles :** choix de textes du Nouveau Testament; illus. by A. and J. Provensen. (Cocorico Press.)

See "Notes from the Back Pew."

**Voice and Speech in the Theatre.** J. Clifford Turner. (Pitman, 20/-.)

A standard work in the "Theatre and Stage" series, giving a comprehensive practical survey of the subject.

Recommended by Graham Suter at the Winchester Summer School.

## SPECIAL NOTES

**The Camp.** John Ferguson. (Epworth Press, 1/-.) H. Cont. act. 4m., 4v. chorus of refugees.

An original Nativity Play in verse and prose, written specially for a U.N. campaign.

The setting is an unspecified refugee camp, in which a Child is born to Yussuf's wife, Maria, and welcomed by modern equivalents of the Shepherds and the Kings. Later, the Family is forced to escape westward, pursued by an unnamed Power seeking to destroy them.

"This child our God and our salvation, this child

Fleeing from strangers?

He a stranger, unwelcomed and unwanted?" asks the Chorus, and the answer is another question,

"Can God's humility make men humble, His love  
Stir theirs?

Rescued by Him, will they rescue others?"

This modernisation of the Nativity is written with force and conviction, and its picture of the Christ Child as a hunted peasant baby of to-day should strike audiences as the author intends. The cast, and the choral passages, are within the capacity of most groups.

On the other hand, the author has encountered the inevitable difficulties of a Nativity play not simply in "modern dress," but in modern times. The Nativity is history of the year 4 B.C. What exactly is happening in "The Camp"? Is the original Nativity happening again? Or is this the first time? Or does it only resemble, significantly, the original? Given the initial idea it is extraordinarily hard to find a satisfactory basis for its working out.

Mr. Ferguson deals with this by making his play as "timeless" as possible, avoiding place names and using "unrealistic" choral speech; but this only obscures the problem without solving it. Is there, in fact, an answer?

Other criticisms have been that the verse is not sufficiently precise in places and that three Roman women with a crystal are a rather startling equivalent for the Wise Men.

We have not yet seen the play produced, and some groups may feel that its positive qualities outweigh its defects. Performance should test it thoroughly, and we hope that this will be done.—B.J.

**How not to write a Play.** Walter Kerr. (Max Reinhardt, 21/-.)

Mr. Kerr's book reads like the joyous explosion of a much-tried critic, after years of work reviewing modern plays. As Drama Critic of the *New York Herald Tribune*, he has very definite personal views on "what is wrong



in the American theatre," and they fill the pages with provocation, entertainment and plain good sense.

There are many books, he explains, on "how to write a play." Most of the new plays he reviews are models of technical competence by those standards. They are also spiritually dead. Why?

The answer ranges from Aeschylus to Eliot and back, and Mr. Kerr has nothing memorable to argue at every point. Though his material is largely American, the book can be highly recommended to English students of drama in need of a breath of fresh air.—B.J.

*Erratum.*—In the Summer issue, *The Jerusalem Gang*, by Lesbia Scott, was described as suitable for teenagers and youth groups. This is incorrect, as the play is intended for children of twelve and under.

### NOW AVAILABLE AFTER A PERIOD OUT OF PRINT

**He that should come.** Dorothy L. Sayers. (Gollancz, 4/6.)

**Bethlehem.** Laurence Housman. (Cape, 3/6.)

## FAR AND WIDE

### Reports and Reviews of Christian Drama Activities in Great Britain and Overseas

ger, Surrey

An arrangement of the fifteenth-century "Noah" plays, performed on the street, was given during a "mediaeval" summer fair at Abinger, near Dorking. The cart, a jolly little "pageant" with blue-and-white striped roof, was taken through the fair, and into the grounds of a Tudor manor-house, where it was drawn up against the side of the house for the performances. The childlike "let's pretend" qualities of the play were delightfully brought

The Ark was "built," stage by stage, in full view of the audience, with planks and canvas being arranged by the boys and his sons on either side of the pageant cart, to make a substantial vessel. The rainbow, at the end, was a length of multicoloured cloth let down from the gable window with a small angel, and caught by two cherub angels at the first floor window, to give a convincing curve!

The players did gallantly, though hampered by last minute haste, and the inevitable determined rainfall. The news that it is to rain for forty days got its usual laugh—the same which must have echoed from the streets of York and Chester for centuries—even on Corpus Christi!

B.J.

Bradford

A pageant, *The Life of Christ*, staged at Odsal Stadium, Bradford, in September, was presented to an audience of some thousands by the Roman Catholic Church, but many denominations co-operated.

We have not yet received an account of the pageant for this magazine, but we are glad to learn that a member of our Bradford Branch took a leading part in this courageous enterprise.

C.R.

\* \* \*

**Durham County Fellowship of Religion and Drama**

#### Annual Report

A keen membership has carried out an interesting programme over the last year.

The play-readings at monthly meetings have provided much scope for discussion, and have included *Johnson Over Jordan*, *Cocktail Party* and *The Old Man of the Mountains*. The most recent reading was of T. S. Eliot's *The Confidential Clerk*, and in this case, our own full discussion was followed up by the opportunity to see the play performed by Durham University students of St. John's College.

We were fortunate to have as one



of our speakers during the year, Mr. W. N. Illingworth, who set out to answer the question, "What are our objectives in Religious Drama?" This profound and illuminating talk pointed out that the ultimate objective was "the solution of man's problems."

A talk equally illuminating, but from an entirely different aspect, was given us by Miss G. A. Wood. Miss Wood spoke on the subject of Mediæval Stagecraft, and of the types of "stages" which were used—both in Church productions, and those given on the village green. The detailed preparations that went into the rehearsal and presentation of the plays of that period, were amusingly illustrated by quotations, and we were shown how much we could learn of these early mystery and miracle plays by observing the scenes from them depicted in Church decoration and carvings.

We have been engaged upon two productions this year. The Principal of the Church Training College in Durham for women teachers, St. Hild's, asked the Fellowship to take part in a Sunday evening programme of Music and Drama, for which we performed the short play, **St. Hild**. For congregation and players alike—all of whom had a strong personal link with the College—to depict scenes from St. Hild's life, in the beautiful Chapel of her College, was indeed an inspiration, for "Her life was a bright example, not only to herself, but to all who desired to live well."

Carrying out our function as the touring group of the Durham County Branch of the Religious Drama Society, we have toured a production of Henri Ghéon's **The Way of The Cross**. The tour opened in Durham with a performance in the lofty Chapel of Bede College, after which the play was taken to Churches in different parts of the County. To the players, who so truly experienced the feeling of Fellowship in their journeyings during those weeks of Lent, it was a source of inspiration to play in such varied surroundings—the large Church of a town, or the very small, ancient Church of a village. Everywhere, the same spirit prevailed—one of friendliness and encouragement—and we hope to revisit these and

other Churches with our next production.

At the close of our year's activities several of our members are looking forward to yet another visit to Summer School. We trust that shall again benefit from their experiences at Winchester, so that we renew our aim—"to encourage development of religious drama."

D. K. BARR, S.

### Cornwall

Every summer for the past five years the Cornwall Religious Drama Fellowship has presented a play at the Minack Theatre, on the cliffs at Porthcove, near Land's End, and every year, successive producer says firmly "Not again!" This year, the lot fell to C. Murray Andrews, founder of the C.R.D.F. who presented Christopher Fry's **The Firstborn**, and the general opinion is that it is the best show the Fellowship has yet put on. But those who have actually experienced the strains and stresses of production at the Minack could appreciate almost insuperable difficulties of the job.

The stage itself was never intended to represent the Egypt of 1200 B.C. The "Celtic concrete" of the permanent setting was disguised with painted flowers wired to the tops of the pillars. A painted tarpaulin was thrown over the concrete "throne," and an eight-foot Sphinx, made by two members of the cast out of chicken wire and painted mâché, was fastened to the top of the stage, originally built for one of the Festivals of Britain plays, and now a fixture of the stage. This Sphinx had to be carried down the cliffs and secured to the table at the height of a south-east gale, with the wind coming straight off the sea, and no shelter for anyone anywhere. It says much for the craftsmen who made it that it stood up to the worst weather of this lamentable summer.

It was a happy and united company whose enthusiasm for the play was in no way damped by disasters, and whose belief in their producer remained firm throughout. Miss Murray Andrews manages to get the very best out of her players.



the acting itself, it would be curious to single out any one performance in a cast which prefers to be anonymous, but the general standard was extremely high, and the work excellent, and in spite of difficult acoustics of the wide, low stage, with the sea always roaring over the rocks below, complete ability was achieved without in any way sacrificing the poetry, or subtlety of the play. Perhaps one might quote the remark of a German student who was present on the first night—"It was wonderful! Wonderful! They spoke so well and speak so clear that I understand each word perfectly!"

\* \* \*

**The Company of the Way** The growing interest in the revival of religious drama, both ancient and modern, came into the news again in North this week, with the inauguration of **The Company of the Way** in Kingston-upon-Hull, who gave their first production at the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Lowgate, on July 5th. The idea of forming a dramatic society drawing its members from the ranks of local cultural organisations dedicated to the production of religious plays of the highest possible quality, came from the Rev. F. J. Denning, Vicar of St. Mary's. For their first production, in which members of 20 churches took part, they fell on two strongly contrasted plays, the traditional **Noah and Flood**, and W. B. Yeats' **The Drunken Man**.

City House records indicate that it was performed in front of Holy Trinity Church in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and though the original text of this play has been lost, the present script, compiled by Rosemary Manning from the records of Cornish, Newcastle and Wakefield, probably bears a close resemblance to the old Hull drama. The performance was given in the churchyard of St. Mary's, and there was a fresh wind whispering through the leaves of gnarled plane-trees, and the rumble of distant traffic to remind them that they were living in

1956, the citizens of Kingston-upon-Hull watched the familiar story unfold before them, in all its splendid, earthy simplicity, for the first time in 400 years.

The approach was robust and uninhibited, with a deliberate roughness of speech and gesture giving the whole production a tang of authenticity. Yet despite the mediæval atmosphere, there was something deeply moving in this artlessly-told story of a man's unquestioning obedience to the Word of God.

The audience filed into the splendid old church for the second part of the programme.

There could hardly have been a more violent contrast between the two works—the one naïve and direct, its sole purpose being to tell the Bible story in a simple visual way; the other probing agonisingly into the deepest complexities of the human intellect.

The play is set in Jerusalem, three days after the Crucifixion. Three men of different races, guard the entrance to the Upper Room where the eleven have taken refuge. Each seeks to find the answer to the events of the past days in the philosophy of his people. To the Hebrew, all hope is lost—the Messiah is dead. To the Greek, all is a phantom—an illusion. Adding a barbaric touch, the Procession of Dionysos, with its curious parallel of a slain god who rises from the dead to the frenzied rites of his worshippers, passes by. The Syrian returns to his companions, bringing the incredible story of bemused soldiers and an empty tomb.

At last, all argument is confounded by the appearance of the Risen Lord—neither corpse nor phantom—who comes to seek His own in the inner chamber.

B.M.D.

\* \* \*

#### Mirfield

**The Old Man of the Mountains** by Norman Nicholson. Quarry Theatre, July 12th and 14th, 1956.

It is difficult to imagine a more suitable stage for **The Old Man of the Mountains** than that of the Quarry Theatre at Mirfield. Miss Keily's production of it there was designed to use



the natural setting of rocks and dry-stone walling to the full. Indeed the whole production was remarkable for its sensitive and economical use of circumstances and cast. The difficult problem of an all-male cast (the annual Quarry play is traditionally performed by theological students from the Hostel and College of the Resurrection) was admirably solved. The part of Martha was (legitimately) only just short of a female impersonation with comedy well to the fore, but without spoiling the character's sympathy. In strong and effective contrast, Ruth (particularly difficult for a man) was played with dignity and, in the scene where her son is brought to life by Elijah, the actor gave us a most convincing portrait of motherhood—a piece of real acting.

Elijah was played strongly. The actor was perhaps more at home with the puzzled old countryman with here and there a suggestion of a simple man's cunning, than in the more exalted passages. We were left in no doubt that Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves.

Ahab in loud tweeds and leggings and an aggressive little red beard was the most finished performance of all, and Obadiah was an energetic "plain man."

The Raven spoke almost too beautifully, and croaked us like any sucking dove, but always with dignity and complete audibility. The Beck babbled enchantingly—a well-disciplined co-operative performance.

Altogether it was a production which seemed to grow out of its setting, and one felt that this was what the Quarry had been waiting for.

N.G.

\* \* \*

Stroud, Glos.

*Religious Drama Festival, Stroud Parish Church, St. Chad of the Seven Wells, by Leo Lehman.*

Looking back at this production of a very fine play makes one realise the tremendous difficulties that occasionally confront a producer, in attempting to present such a work in the way in which the author intended; and how easy it is to shift the emphasis, when no clear instructions are given.

The technical difficulties were over-

come in a masterly way. The action of the play requires two main settings: the king's hall and a forest retreat. In the theatre this would have been easy to portray; but in church where costumes could not be drawn or scenes moved, the dual effect had to be created by the skilful use of lighting.

Having set the scene, the producer was still faced with the difficult task of interpreting and presenting the characters. It would have been easy to have failed and presented Chad as a simple, weak, vacillating figure, instead of the fine Christian saint that he was. The true effect was achieved by using other characters as a foil; especially Bishop Wilfred and Emerild. The producer, who played St. Chad, used the part of Bishop Wilfred to gain light relief, and presented Emerild as a tragic, disillusioned Queen. (It was discovered later that the author intended the Queen to be the amusing character, Bishop Wilfred, serious, idealistic and sincere, though obviously wrong).

The vital point of the last scene—the return of the Hart—the symbol of God's presence—was difficult to emphasise, and one felt that many in the audience may have missed its tremendous significance. The play ended with a death-bed scene in which there is no note of Christian joy and hope, no hint of resurrection.

These criticisms, of course, concern the play more than this production, which was extremely well done. The costumes, in the style of seven-century Britain, were unusually good and gave great scope for ideas at this period, which is seldom required on the stage.

The organ music was ably chosen and helped to form the right background.

Mr. Leo Lehman came to see the play later in the week, and was impressed and pleased with the production, even though it was not done quite as he had visualised it.

E.H.

\* \* \*

Sheffield

*What speaks in the World to-day*

On one of the numerous Saturday afternoons of this summer



# THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

*An interdenominational body working in association with S.P.C.K.*

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THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY  
OF GREAT BRITAIN

166 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE  
LONDON  
W.C.2

*RULES*



1.—The name of the Society shall be The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain.

2.—The objects of the Society shall be: To foster the art of drama as a means of religious expression and to assist the production of plays which explore and interpret the Christian view of life.

3.—(a) Membership of the Society shall be open to all persons who are desirous of furthering the aims of the Society and any group formed for the purpose of performing religious plays if approved by the Council.

(b) The Council of the Society may from time to time elect any person or persons who have given or are giving distinguished service to the cause of religious drama either as Patrons, Presidents or Vice-Presidents of the Society. They may, if not already members of the Society, be made honorary members on such terms and conditions and for such period or periods as the Council may from time to time think fit.

### Subscriptions

4.—(a) All members whether individual or groups, other than honorary members, or life members, shall pay an annual minimum subscription of one guinea, or such other amount as the Council may from time to time determine. A member may become a life member on payment of the sum of Fifteen Guineas.

(b) All subscriptions shall be payable on election and thereafter in advance on the 1st January and 1st July in each year whichever date approximates most nearly the period of twelve months provided that in the event of any member applying to be elected prior to but within one calendar month of either of such dates, the first period of 12 months shall be deemed to run from the next 1st January or 1st July respectively.

(c) No member shall be entitled to vote or be eligible for any offices or share in any privilege of the Society while his or her subscription is in arrear.

(d) Any member whose subscription is more than twelve months in arrear shall cease to be a member, but may be reinstated on such terms as the Council may think fit.

### The Council

5.—(a) The administration of the Society and disposition of its funds shall be vested in a Council which shall consist of:—

(i) Twenty members of the Society elected annually by the Society in General Meeting.

(ii) One representative appointed annually by each Branch of the Society (not being an Associated or Affiliated Society) in accordance with Rule 14.

In the event of an appointed representative being unable to attend any meeting of the Council, the Branch may, with the approval of the Council, appoint an alternative representative who shall be entitled to attend and vote at such meeting.

(iii) Those ex-officio members mentioned in Rule 8 Provided Always that not less than two-thirds of the members of the Council for the time being shall be members of the Church of England.

(b) The Council shall make such arrangements as they shall think fit as to the manner of the annual elections and whether by postal ballot or votes taken at a General Meeting of Members.



(c) The Council shall submit to each Annual General Meeting nominations for each of the Offices and Council.

Any member of the Society may nominate any member of the Society for election to the Council or to any office provided that such nomination be sent in writing to the National Secretary not less than (four) weeks before the Annual General Meeting. The Council may nominate any member of the Society for election to any Office or to the Council at or before its meeting prior to the Annual General Meeting. All retiring members of the Council shall be eligible for re-election.

(d) The Council shall meet not less than once every two months and the quorum shall be seven. The Director and the Financial Secretary of S.P.C.K. shall be entitled to attend and speak at all meetings of the Council but shall not be entitled to vote.

(e) The Council shall elect its own Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

(f) Any casual vacancy occurring on the Council may be filled by the Council.

6.—The Council may from time to time appoint for such purposes as the Council thinks fit, committees with or without the power to add to their number, and committees so appointed may appoint sub-committees with or without a similar power to add; but unless power to do so is given by the Council, the decisions of the committees and sub-committees shall require sanction of the Council.

7.—All cheques shall be signed by not less than two members of the Council.

### Annual General Meeting

8.—(a) An Annual General Meeting of the Members of the Society shall be held in October or November in each year, at which a report of the proceedings since the preceding Annual General Meeting, together with a statement of the Society's Accounts duly audited, shall be presented, and the 20 members to serve on the Council shall be elected, unless already elected by postal ballot.

(b) In addition to the election of the members of the Council, the Meeting shall elect:—

(i) A Chairman and an Honorary Treasurer or Honorary Treasurers who shall be ex-officio members of the Council.

(ii) The Auditors for the ensuing year.

(iii) If necessary, an Honorary Secretary and an Honorary Director who if elected shall be ex-officio members of the Council.

(c) The Council shall on requisition in writing signed by at least 20 members summon a Special General Meeting of members at not less than 14 days' notice for the consideration of any urgent matter.

(d) No business shall be brought forward at any General Meeting save that of which notice in writing has been given at the office of the Society ten days before such a meeting.

9.—The financial year of the Society shall be deemed to end on 30th June in each year and the accounts, duly audited, shall be laid before the members at the Annual General Meeting.

10.—Subject to the provisions of this rule, the Council shall have power to make, on such terms as to subscription and otherwise howsoever, and with such powers of modification from time to time as it thinks fit, arrangements with any other Society having objects similar to that of the Society or with any group of not less than 12 other existing members of the Society whereby such other Society or group of members shall become a Branch of, or associated or affiliated with the Society.



11.—The present and future members of any Society or group of members which shall become a Branch of the Society (but not of a Society which becomes associated or affiliated with this Society) shall become members of the Society with the right to attend meetings of the Society and to take office in the Society if duly elected thereto.

12.—A Branch of the Society once constituted shall continue as such until a notice in writing shall have been (a) sent by the Society to the Secretary of the Branch, *or* (b) by the Branch to the Secretary of the Society, terminating its association with the Society. Such notice shall in either case be sent by prepaid post, and shall not be sent on behalf of the Society unless sanctioned by a General Meeting of the Society.

13.—No Society becoming a Branch or an Associated or Affiliated Society, or any member thereof, shall have or acquire any interest in the Funds or other assets of the Society.

14.—Each Branch of the Society constituted in accordance with these rules shall be entitled to nominate one of their number to serve as a member of the Council of the Society.

### Alteration of Rules

15.—Subject as hereinafter mentioned these Rules may from time to time be repealed, amended or added to by a majority of not less than at least two-thirds of the members present and voting at any Annual or Special General Meeting provided that notice of such proposed repeal, amendment or addition has been duly given in accordance with these Rules.

Provided always that no alteration to the Objects of the Society or amendment to Rules 2 and 16 shall be made so as to permit any object other than a charitable object or allow the application of the funds to any purpose which may not be charitable.

### Winding-Up

16.—The income and property of the Society whencesoever derived shall be applied solely towards the promotion of the objects of the Society as stated in Rule 2 and no portion thereof shall be paid or transferred directly or indirectly by way of dividend, bonus, or otherwise by way of profit to the members of the Society Provided That nothing herein shall prevent the repayment to any member of legitimate expenses incurred in the furtherance of the work of the Society or prevent the payment in good faith of reasonable and proper remuneration to any officer or servant of the Society or to any member of the Society in return for any services actually rendered to the Society.

In the event of the winding-up of the Society, its surplus assets after the discharge of all liabilities shall not be distributed amongst the members of the Society (except in so far as any monies that may be or become due to any member in respect of any loan or advance made to the Society by any member or in respect of any claim by any member for any monies due to him or her from the Society which may be legally payable) but shall be given or transferred to some other Society or Institution having object similar to the objects of the Society and which shall prohibit the distribution of its funds amongst its members to an extent at least as great as is imposed on the Society by these rules. Such other Society or Institution to be determined by the Society in General Meeting at or before the time of such dissolution, and if and so far as effect cannot be given to such provisions then to some charitable object.